

The Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

For Immediate Release

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Three Month Extension of Current *Puerto Rico Birth Certificates Enacted to provide Transition to New, More Secure Documents*

Washington, D.C. - The Government of Puerto Rico has approved an amendment that extends the validity of current Puerto Rico birth certificates for three months, through Sept. 30, 2010, to provide a transition period as the Island gears up to begin issuing new, more secure certificates starting July 1, 2010, announced Nicole Guillemard, executive director of the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA).

The purpose of the extension is to provide those Puerto Rico-born - who may need a birth certificate for an upcoming transaction - a three-month window to apply for and receive the new document during which time their current birth certificate will still be valid, Guillemard explained.

"Puerto Rico is issuing new birth certificates starting July 1 to combat fraud and protect the identity and credit of all people born on the Island. Our goal with the three-month extension is to provide a smooth transition, especially to assist Puerto Ricans born in the Island who currently reside stateside, as they apply for the new, more secure birth certificates," Guillemard said.

Guillemard said PRFAA has been working with federal, state and community partners to provide information about Puerto Rico's birth certificate law.

The Government of Puerto Rico has taken a number of steps to be ready for those applying for the new certificates, she said. Earlier this year, PRFAA launched an information outreach campaign aimed at states with large Puerto Rican populations. In May, the Government launched an on-line application process through the E-Government website - www.pr.gov - to provide convenience and ease-of-use for those applying for the new certificate.

In addition, Puerto Rico's Demographic Registry recently hired 47 temporary workers to join the agency's personnel to work on new birth certificate applications, and the agency is extending work week hours, and adding Saturday hours, to speed processing of applications.

Last year, Puerto Rico enacted the new law which calls for issuing new, security-enhanced certificates beginning July 1, 2010 to address the unlawful use of Puerto Rico-issued birth certificates to commit identity theft and fraud.

The law was based on collaborations with the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and addresses a concern specific to Puerto Rico, where in the past, many common official and unofficial transactions unnecessarily required the submission, retention, and storage of birth certificates.

As a result, hundreds of thousands of original birth certificates were stored without adequate protection, making them easy targets for theft. This left Puerto Rico-born citizens vulnerable to identity theft, ruined credit, stolen Social Security benefits, and increased "random" security checks at airports, among others. In addition to issuing new birth certificates, the new law expressly prohibits any public or private entity in Puerto Rico from retaining an original birth certificate to end this practice.

Guillemard underscored that only those who need a birth certificate for a transaction or official purpose need apply right away. Those who want to obtain a copy for their records can do so at a later date to avoid an unnecessary rush of applications.

Instructions on how to apply, as well as information on Puerto Rico's birth certificate law, can be found at: www.prfaa.com/birthcertificates/, www.prfaa.com/certificadosdenacimiento/, and www.cga.ct.go/lprac.

The new birth certificates will be issued through the Puerto Rico Health Department's Vital Statistics office.